

Correctly Honouring the Weekly Shabbat

Introduction

This article is not concerned with the calendar, YHWH's calendar is the subject of a separate article.¹ The intention of this article is to analyse what is said in the Scriptures about the seventh day from a perspective many may not have considered and generate some new thinking. So, when we consider the seventh day Shabbat the main contentions surround,

- What is work?
- Conducting commerce
- Travelling on Shabbat
- Lighting a fire
- Cooking on Shabbat
- Shabbat Prohibits Sexual Relations

Before we discuss the above items it may be prudent to decide what is the Shabbat – how long is it? This question is not affected by the start and finish of a Scriptural day. In other words, it makes no difference how you measure a Scriptural day. The question we must ask is, is the Shabbat a period of twenty-four hours or is it a period of twelve hours? Whilst there is no express provision concerning this issue offered within the Scriptures, it comes back to two issues: 1) whether the Scriptural definition of a day is applicable and 2) the words of Mashiach in John.9:4 are to be taken literally. Personally I consider the definition of a day (given in the creation record) to be irrelevant. We are not discussing the start and finish of a Scriptural day. I consider Mashiach's words to be the guiding light for this issue,

It is necessary for Me to work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day – night is coming, when no one is able to work. (John.9:4).

If we take Mashiach's comment literally, unless specifically stated otherwise, a Shabbat is 6:00am to 6:00pm. Many would argue that this is taking Mashiach's comment out of context, alleging that He is referring to Himself as the light and His departing from this world as the darkness. But this understanding means we are all currently living in darkness which is absurd.

Defining Work with Respect to Shabbat

Outside of Judaism, where the Rabbis have determined what constitutes work, there is inconsistency concerning what is permitted and what is not. Some will contend that you should not clean, tidy your house or wash dirty dishes on Shabbat. Yet these same people will make up the bed after rising and after grooming, they leave the bathroom in a tidy state: so where is the consistency? Of course, we should not decide to do a full house clean on Shabbat. But are we really meant to have our home at its most dishevelled and dirtiest on the most holy day of the week? Is this how we are to welcome Mashiach on Shabbat? If we are entertaining visitors, we make sure the home is presentable, why not for Mashiach? So let us examine what the Scriptures do instruct,

Six days you labour, and shall do all your work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of YHWH your Elohim. You do not do any work – you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, so that your male servant and your female servant rest as you do. (Deut.5:13-14).

¹ 'Yah's Calendar' in miscellaneous articles on the website www.undertorah.com

Six days you work, but on the seventh day you rest – in ploughing time and in harvest you rest. (Exod. 34:21).

Let us add a passage from Genesis,

And to the man He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'Do not eat of it': Cursed is the ground because of you, in toil you are to eat of it all the days of your life, and the ground shall bring forth thorns and thistles for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face, you are to eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you return." (Gen.3:17-19).

Because of the fall, man must toil to survive but YHWH has designated this is to be over six, not seven days. Six days we are to be concerned with working in the world but on the seventh day we are to rest from toiling, 'come out' of this world and join with YHWH. When we link what is said in Exodus and Deuteronomy with Genesis there is strong support for confining the term work to servile work, that which we must perform to live and survive on this planet. If the term in Exodus and Deuteronomy was meant to be all encompassing there would be no need to extend the prohibition as is the case with the following passage from Isaiah,

If you do turn back your foot from the Shabbat, from doing your pleasure on My set-apart day, and shall call the Shabbat 'a delight,' the set-apart day of YHWH 'esteemed,' and shall esteem it, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in YHWH. And I shall cause you to ride on the heights of the earth and feed you with the inheritance of Yaakov your father. For the mouth of YHWH has spoken!" (Isa.58:13-14).

Here the prohibition extends to leisure, to pleasing ourselves; gardening, washing the car, playing a sport etc., all of which is 'work.' Does not Isaiah support a limited application for the term 'work' in Exodus and Deuteronomy? If the term work was meant as 'all-encompassing there would be no need for the amplification given in Isaiah. According to Isaiah even our conversation should primarily be steered towards spiritual issues and not secular matters. Does this mean we cannot speak a word that is not associated with worship, of course not but we must keep the right perspective and remember the purpose of the Shabbat day, i.e., to have YHWH in the forefront of our minds. The essence is for us not to behave in a manner that negates our duty of worship on this day by seeking the gratification of the flesh and human sensuality.

Remembering that Mashiach performed works of healing on Shabbat it is impossible to interpret works in an all-encompassing way and we must temper our understanding of the prohibitions accordingly. Certainly, where charity or life and death situations demand our involvement, we can perform work but even then, we must exercise caution. I remember some time ago when a church used to arrange a 'working bee' after the service and members of the congregation would knock on the doors of the elderly and offer to tidy the garden etc. This is, I believe, a misconception of true Shabbat observance because the work could have been arranged outside of the Shabbat. Mashiach said "The Shabbat was made for man, not man for the Shabbat" and we must temper our interpretation of work in a sensible and reasonable way: whilst we should not be hand-cuffed by the term we cannot run wild and loose.

Then we have the priests they worked every Shabbat but in Yahweh's service, which is the essence of a Shabbat. Thus, work is confined to societal work.

Conducting Commerce

If we confine the definition of work to that of all servile activity, are we permitted to conduct a business transaction that does not involve work, visiting a restaurant, food hall or cafeteria for example? We can answer this question in two ways; firstly, both Exodus and Deuteronomy prohibit us from causing people (and animals) to perform work in our favour. It is difficult not to apply this prohibition to private people such as waiters etc. Secondly, we must take cognizance of what is said in Nehemiah and Jeremiah,

There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all kinds of goods, and sold on the Shabbat unto the children of Judah, and in Yerushalayim. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, What evil thing is this that you are doing, and profane the Shabbat day? Did not your fathers do the same, causing our Elohim to bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet you bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Shabbat. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Yerushalayim began to be dark before the Shabbat, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Shabbat: and I stationed some of my servants at the gates, so that no burden should be brought in on the Shabbat day. So, the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside of Yerushalayim once or twice. And I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no more on the Shabbat. (Neh.13:16-21).

And that if the peoples of the land bring wares or any grain to sell on the Shabbat day, we would not buy it from them on the Shabbat, or on a set-apart day, and we would forego the seventh year and the interest of every debt. (Neh.10:31).

But if you will not hearken unto me to hallow the Shabbat day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Yerushalayim on the Shabbat day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Yerushalayim, and it shall not be quenched. (Jer.17:27).

Clearly these verses tell us that YHWH does not allow any commercial transactions, buying or selling, of any type on Shabbat. Several decades ago, it was hard to find a shop or restaurant open on Sunday because even the Sunday keepers recognised it was work and against Scripture. Incidentally the Vatican is currently making overtures to reimpose this law.

Travelling on Shabbat

*See, because YHWH has given you the Shabbat, therefore He is giving you bread for two days on the sixth day. Let each one stay in his place (*tachath*), do not let anyone go out of his place (*maqom*) on the seventh day. (Exod.16:29).*

The above is probably an extremely poor presentation of what YHWH intended to be understood. What is interesting is that two quite different Hebrew words have been translated 'place' which makes the presentation questionable. The Hebrew '*tachath*' is more commonly translated under, in one or two instances it is translated 'instead of' and 'for.' It is rarely translated place, whereas '*maqom*' is regularly translated 'place.' What is more, we must not break the verses into two parts and should remember it was originally written without any punctuation. Considering this latter fact, it becomes more apparent that this is an instruction not to go searching for manna on the seventh day and has nothing to do with remaining within the confines of one's home. This verse has never had such a literal interpretation, did not the ancients gather in the synagogue on Shabbat? But let us consider Yahusha Mashiach for a moment,

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of Elohim. (2Cor.5:21).

Everyone doing sin also does lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:4).

From the first verse we are told that Mashiach was sinless which, according to the second verse, means He never transgressed YHWH's Torah: yet He travelled on Shabbat,

At that time Yahusha Mashiach went through the grain fields on the Shabbat. And His taught ones were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain, to eat. (Matt.12:1).

So, we can dismiss any teaching that we must stay within our own homes on Shabbat. But what about distance: is there a limit on how far we can travel on Shabbat? Not as far as YHWH's Torah is concerned, the restriction of 2000 cubits (a little less than a kilometer) for Shabbat travel which the Rabbis have mandated, is purely a Pharisaic/Rabbinic rule. From where did this measure come? C. S. Keener suggests the distance was after extrapolating what is said in Exod.16:29 together with what is said in Num. 35:5,

See, because YHWH has given you the Shabbat, therefore He is giving you bread for two days on the sixth day. Let each one stay in his place, do not let anyone go out of his place on the seventh day. (Exod.16:29).

"And you shall measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits. And the city is in the middle. This is to them the open land for the cities. (Num. 35:5).

We have dealt with Exodus 16 earlier. The verse from Numbers has nothing to do with travel, it is defining the area of land to be set aside for the Levitical families. The restriction of 2000 cubits is a doctrine of man and not from YHWH's Torah.

Let us again consider Yahusha Mashiach. Didn't He command for us to follow in His footsteps (Matt.16:24), so did He adhere to the 2000-cubit restriction? Luke chapter 4 provides an interesting record concerning an event surrounding Mashiach on a particular Shabbat,

And He came to Natsaret, where He had been brought up. And according to His practice, He went into the congregation on the Shabbat day, and stood up to read. "The Spirit of YHWH is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to bring the Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send away crushed ones with a release, to proclaim the acceptable year of YHWH." (Luke 4:16-19).

A few verses later we are told how the synagogue audience revolted against Him,

And all those in the congregation, when they heard this, were filled with wrath. And rising they drove Him out of the city and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, in order to throw Him down. But He, passing through the midst of them, went away. And He came down to Kepharnahum, a city of Galil, and was teaching them on the Sabbats. (Luke 4:28-31).

Mashiach left the crowd at Natsaret and travelled to Kepharnahum – on a Shabbat. This is about 24 kilometres and whilst we cannot assert, He completed the journey in one day there is absolutely no reason to believe He adhered to the Pharisaic rule. Remember He had already been taken to a hill within the city limits and this would have used up some, possibly all, of the distance allowed. It is very doubtful Mashiach would have been concerned with the doctrine of men and we must follow His example. But we are now left with Acts chapter 12,

Then they went back to Yerushalayim from the Mount of Olives, which is near Yerushalayim, a Shabbat day's journey. (Acts. 1:12).

We have already established that the Torah has no restriction on Shabbat travel and YHWH has decreed that nothing is to be added to His Torah (Deut.4:2), so this verse cannot be quoting YHWH's law. It is merely expressing distance using a customary term of the day: it must not be understood to infer that the disciples were keeping a Pharisaic tradition. However, we must keep things in perspective it would not be observing the principles of Shabbat worship if we were to embark on a journey of some length and use up many Shabbat hours, that is, the journey must not take precedence over worship and should be for worship purposes.

Lighting a Fire on Shabbat

*Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a set apart day a Shabbat of rest to YHWH. Whosoever does any work therein shall be put to death. Do not kindle a fire throughout your habitations (*môshâb*) upon the Shabbat day. (Exod.35:2-3).*

Some translations have dwellings for the Hebrew *môshâb*, thus these translations read "Do not kindle a fire in your dwellings" but it is important we base our interpretation on the culture existing when the text was given and not the culture of today. When we consider that the people would have relied on fire for warmth, light and cooking within their homes, it is hard to conceive that YHWH would prohibit these necessities, particularly for young families on cold winter nights? YHWH says that we are to delight in the Shabbat which would be difficult in the light of such prohibitions.

Strong provides the following definitions for *Môshâb*

From [H3427](#); a seat; figuratively a site; abstractly a session; by extension, an abode (the place or the time); by implication population: - assembly, dwell in, dwelling (-place), wherein (that) dwelt (in), inhabited place, seat, sitting, situation, sojourning.

As said earlier there was no punctuation when these verses were given, and meaning can be altered very considerably when punctuation is added. Again, the opening comment is concerning work on Shabbat and what follows should be read in this context. We must not let punctuation change context of the message. Also, as per our previous comment, we must understand the verses in term of the culture existing when the instruction was given. Fire was an essential source of many trades; blacksmith, those involved in the manufacture of tools and the shaping of metal, the manufacture of utensils and so on. In other words, do not light a fire for the purpose of works. When understood in this way it would have been better for '*moshab*' to have been translated 'population' and the verse reading 'Do not kindle a fire throughout your populations.' Another significant point is that this verse forms a preamble to verses detailing the work required in constructing the tabernacle, its equipment, and furnishings. This required a tremendous amount of work including the melting down of various metals which required fire. But before giving the details of the tabernacle Moshe reminds them of the ground rules: "*you have six days of the week to do this work, but the seventh day is a Shabbat rest to YHWH.*" And then he adds an additional warning: "*Do not light your fires in your habitations (within the population) on the Sabbath,*" which when viewed in context is an admonition not to do any of this construction work on the Shabbat.

YHWH does not forbid a fire to warm your homes on a cold Shabbat night, nor a cooking fire for the provision of hot meals, nor the lighting of a lamp in the dark. The statement about lighting fires on the Shabbat was not an addition to the basic principles of Shabbat observance. It was a reminder of the command to rest from our work on the seventh day. When we consider context, the only correct interpretation can mean a fire kindled for the purpose of doing work. Exodus 35:3 is only a source of confusion when it is plucked out from the surrounding story and used out of context.

Cooking on Shabbat

When we consider the issue of cooking on Shabbat, we are generally concerned with the single verse below,

And he said to them, "This is what YHWH has said, 'Tomorrow is a rest, a Shabbat set-apart to YHWH. That which you bake, bake; and that which you cook, cook. And lay up for yourselves all that is left over, to keep it until morning.'" (Exod.16:23).

Is it possible we are making two mistakes: firstly, reading what is not specifically said and secondly not considering the adjoining verses?

Verse 23 has no express instruction to cook enough for two days, yet that is what we understand the passage to say. For example, could 'left over' refer to what is remaining uncooked after having cooked sufficient for that one day? Interestingly, in the earlier verse 5 when YHWH wants the people to do the work of two days He explicitly says so,

And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare (kûn) what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. (Exod.16:5).

Using verse 5 as a premise would not YHWH in verse 23, have expressly told the people to cook sufficient for two days if this is what He wanted? Indeed, it makes more sense for Exod.16:23 to be instructing for the uncooked excess food to be kept until morning because this was a test of their faith in YHWH. Consider the preceding verses,

And Moshe said, "Let no one leave any of it until morning." And they did not listen to Moshe, so some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moshe was wroth with them. (Exod.16:19-20)

This verse refers to the midweek collection of manna and there was no reason for them to cook for two days, because the manna was available each day. Thus, the excess food they retained and rotted was uncooked. But with respect to the excess collected on the Friday, YHWH is now telling them to keep it until morning,

"This is what YHWH has said, 'Tomorrow is a rest, a Shabbat set-apart to YHWH. That which you bake, bake; and that which you cook, cook. And lay up for yourselves all that is left over, to keep it until morning.'" And they laid it up till morning, as Moshe commanded. And it did not stink, and no worm was in it. (Exod.16:23-24).

If we are to correctly understand Exod.16:22-23 it is imperative, we consider the verses around them. There are two issues for YHWH. The first is obedience – will the people obey His instruction not to look for manna on the seventh day having instructed them to collect a double quantity on the sixth day. Would they have sufficient trust in Him, knowing that the manna they had collected throughout the week did not keep until the next day without rotting? Obviously, some did not and went out on the Shabbat to collect manna. A second possible issue was that YHWH wanted to demonstrate His powers to them, preventing the manna left over from the sixth day from rotting on the seventh day. For this miracle to be appreciated the manna would have to have remained in the same uncooked condition as that which had rotted by the mid-week mornings. Is it for this reason Moshe said "keep it until morning" in verse 23 and not 'keep it for the Shabbat day' as would be more appropriate if the common understanding was correct. Indeed, when we compare the wording of verses 20 'Let no one leave any of it until morning' with that in verse 23 'And lay up for yourselves all that is left over, to keep it until morning,' we find support for this logic.

Then we have 16:5 which some allege supports a no cooking rule,

*And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare (*kûn*) what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. (Exod.16:5).*

There is a tendency to link 'prepare' with 'twice as much' however, there is a possible anomaly with the Hebrew *kûn* which has the meaning to confirm or establish. When we consider the true meaning of the Hebrew we can see the true intent of this verse,

And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall establish (confirm the amount) what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. (Exod.16:5).

Hence the verse has nothing to do with preparation it is concerned with the quantity of manna to be gathered/collected. However, there is no reason for us not to complete all the preparation for cooking before the Shabbat. In my view the premise should be to do as little activity as possible outside of worship. It is an issue of conscience.

Shabbat Prohibits Sexual Relations

Yahweh's Shabbats are the appointed times on His calendar when He has freed Himself up to meet with us. When He has freed Himself up to be with us. When we observe His Shabbats, it is the equivalent as standing in His presence. That said, it is incumbent on us to present ourselves correctly. When Yahweh planned to meet with the people at Sinai, He instructed for the people to be both physically clean and spiritually clean,

And Yahweh said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, (Exod.19:10)

And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: do not come near your wife, (Exod.19:15).

The Torah tells us that a sexual emission makes a person unclean until the following evening,

And when a man has an emission of semen, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until evening. (Lev.15:16)

A bodily emission makes a person unclean until the following evening.

Conclusion

When we consider all of YHWH's moedim, each has its own significance and except for Yom Kippur there is no express provision not to cook. Even with Yom Kippur there is no express command not to cook, only to afflict oneself. Why should the weekly Shabbat be considered differently? The theme for the weekly Shabbat is rest and is seen as the prototype of YHWH's plan for humanity – 6 days/thousand years of toil and 1 day/thousand years of rest, being the millennial rule of Mashiach. Thus, if the weekly Shabbat is a blueprint of a thousand years it is inconceivable to say cooking and lighting fires will be prohibited for a thousand years.

Yes, the seventh day of the week is to be treated differently but we need to ask, have we strayed from what YHWH intended? Would a loving, compassionate, caring Elohim require His faithful to freeze on a chilly winter night, sitting in the dark, taking only cold food and drink? Let us not forget that the winters in the Land were very cold even the animals were put under cover. How is it possible to delight in Shabbat observance (58:13), if it is to be the most arduous and uncomfortable day of the week? The Shabbat was given to us so that we could come to the Father without the hindrance this world puts upon us. By separating the Shabbat day YHWH offered to take away the difficulties imposed by life in this

world and smooth the way for us to enjoy our worship with Him and what do we do? We choose to make it the most problematic of days, isn't that ironic?

Mashiach said, "The Shabbat was made for man, not man for Shabbat" Shabbat was never meant to enslave us, it was never meant to be a burden to us: quite the opposite, it is meant to be a delight. How can this be if, by our understanding, we make this day a greater hardship than a common day. However, it is best that we do not perform any activity that can be done on a common day.

We must remember that Shabbats are the appointed times for us to meet with YHWH and it is important for us to present ourselves correctly mentally and physically. For example, we must be in a clean state, as was required of the priest when he entered the Most Holy Place and came into the presence of YHWH. We must avoid anything that will make us unclean such as a sexual relationship: a seminal emission results in uncleanness until the following evening.

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